

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A composite wave plate composed of two laminated wave plates, characterized in that:

5       letting  $\theta_1$  represent the azimuth angle of the optical axis of the first wave plate with respect to the plane of polarization of incident light thereon in the Poincare sphere representation,  $\theta_2$  represent the azimuth angle of the optical axis of the second wave plate with respect to the plane of polarization of incident  
10 light thereon in the Poincare sphere representation,  $\Gamma_1$  represent a phase rotation about the axis of rotation  $R_1$  of the first wave plate in the Poincare sphere representation, and  $\Gamma_2$  represent a phase rotation about the axis of rotation  $R_2$  of the second wave plate in the Poincare sphere representation,

15        $\theta_2 - \theta_1 \neq \pi/2$ ;

and that a phase difference  $\Gamma_T$  of the composite wave plate satisfies

$$\Gamma_T = (2 \times \theta_1 - \pi/2) \cos \Gamma_1 + (2 \times \theta_2 - \pi) \cos \Gamma_2.$$